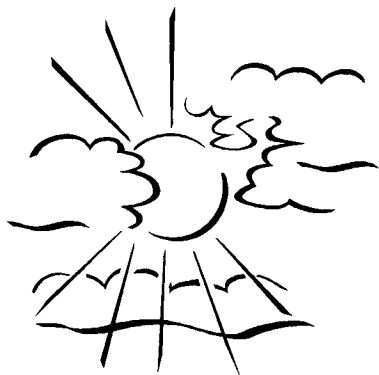


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Monday, November 28, 2005

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Putting families first

Children are being taken into care too quickly and for too long

THE budget bill passed recently by the House of Representatives includes around \$50 billion in spending cuts, many of them aimed at federal programmes for the poor. This includes trims of around \$5 billion in child support, \$600m for children in foster care and around \$700m in food stamps. A similar bill from the Senate contains \$34 billion of cuts with far fewer swipes at social-welfare programmes, but both bills include between \$60 billion and \$70 billion in tax cuts that disproportionately favour the rich. Child advocates are enraged. As states consider reforming their child-welfare systems, big cuts in social services are not helpful.

Tales of missing, starved, abused and even murdered children in adopted homes and foster shelters are alarmingly common. Some escape the attention of overburdened social workers; others are shuttled from one foster-care placement to another for years on end. Last year, a Pew

Commission on Children in Foster Care concluded that, because of the way federal funding works, children were plucked from their families too soon and left to fester in the system for too long. And although judges play a critical role in moving children to safety, family courts are among the most under-funded in the system, with few incentives to attract top lawyers and judges and little collaboration between the courts and child-welfare agencies. Dependency lawyers tend to be overworked and underpaid, with predictably bad results for the children they represent.

More than 500,000 children are in foster care in America, most of them black or Latino. They remain in the system for an average of three years. These children, typically placed in the state's care after suffering abuse and neglect at home, often endure a demoralising parade of indifferent caseworkers, lawyers, judges, teachers ►►

► and foster parents, who offer little real support in their quest for a stable home. For those who cannot return to their birth parents, the situation is grim: in 2003, 119,000 children in America were waiting to be adopted, 67% of whom had been in foster care for more than two years, according to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

When such children "age out", or turn 18, as 18,000-20,000 do every year, they are suddenly cut off from all special services such as housing and counselling. Studies show that they disproportionately drop out of college, become homeless and unemployed, turn to drugs and alcohol and spend time in jail.

The federal government pays around half America's \$22 billion child-welfare bill, according to the Urban Institute; the rest comes from state and local governments. But states have not been held accountable for how they spend this money. In an extensive three-year audit of state child-welfare systems, the HHS found that not a single state was in compliance with federal safety standards. When it came to the seven federal standards used to assess children's programmes, some of which are almost embarrassingly basic (eg, "Children are first and foremost protected from

abuse and neglect" and "Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs"), 16 states did not meet any of them, and no state met more than two. The federal agency is now running a second round of audits, to assess whether states are now complying with their own improvement plans.

"We are spending a great deal of money to damage children," says Marcia Robinson Lowry, director of Children's Rights, an advocacy group. There are no real consequences for states when they fail to meet federal targets, she argues, so class-action lawsuits are the only recourse. Children's Rights has represented foster children in 13 court cases in the past decade. Most of these have ended in a court-ordered settlement that sets the group as a watchdog over a state's mismanaged and overburdened social-services department.

But using the courts to solve America's child-welfare problems is expensive and inefficient. The best answer, many think, is for states to spend money on keeping families together, by investing in services such as child care and counselling, rather than putting children in care. This would require allowing states to use federal funding in different ways. Most federal dollars now begin flowing to states only when

children are removed from their families, giving states a perverse incentive to keep children in foster care, explains Carol Emig, the director of the Pew Commission. Instead, the commission suggests that states need a little more federal money to cover all children, not just poor ones, and the flexibility to create a range of services that might keep children from entering care or help them leave care safely.

Such a change carries quite a price-tag: \$5 billion over ten years. But advocates say it will bring long-term savings by producing better educated, less delinquent children and more united families. If states safely reduce their foster-care rolls, they can then reinvest dollars earmarked for foster care in other child-welfare services. Meanwhile, federal reviews will hold states to their programme promises. President George Bush has proposed, alternatively, that states should convert their foster-care entitlement programmes into block grants. That would give flexibility at first but, over time, it would amount to a cut in funds.

States and cities can already apply for waivers from federal funding restraints; some 20 states have waivers now. Advocates of flexible funding point to Illinois, a waiver recipient, where the foster-care population has been cut in half and adoptions have more than doubled since 1997. And in late October officials in New York City announced that the number of children in foster care has dropped to around 18,000, half of what it was six years ago. Once home to one of the worst foster-care systems in the country, the city now works to keep families intact and help them look after their children rather than taking the youngsters away. As a result, "the spigot coming into the system has been narrowed", explains David Tobis, director of the Child Welfare Fund, a local organisation. The money saved from federal entitlements—an estimated \$27m in the fiscal year that began in July—will be put back into preventive services.

October also saw Arnold Schwarzenegger, California's governor, sign into law a number of bills to help the state's foster children—more than 80,000 of them. Most of the new laws will help teenagers when they turn 18, by making sure they stay in college and have somewhere to live.

Amid all the horror stories, it can be easy to lose sight of the people who make foster care work. After describing the madness of waiting all day at court to represent a client, only to receive five minutes of a distracted judge's time, one social worker goes on to describe some of the good foster parents she has met. Her voice grows tender when she describes one couple who have taken in a young, physically disabled child. "You tend to hear about the system's flaws", she explains. "But there are also so many other amazing things." ■

Michigan

Group home owners upset

State suggests patience with rule change proposals

November 28, 2005

BY DAWSON BELL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Licensing officials for adult foster care facilities in Michigan are getting an earful of criticism over proposed changes in the regulation of homes for infirm and elderly persons -- including complaints that the changes are being driven by organized labor.

Industry insiders -- including home operators and patient advocates -- say they fear the changes that could go into effect next year will be costly, counterproductive and ultimately detrimental to the quality of care for patients. Many of them also say unions like the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees are pushing the new rules as a recruiting tool.

Union representatives insist the quality of foster care suffers when wages are low and staff turnover is high, as they claim is common, and that the state has a responsibility to improve the situation.

The state Department of Human Services, which denies that union interests have hijacked the preliminary process, wants parties on both sides to be patient. None of the proposed rules, covering more than 5,000 licensed facilities housing about 50,000 people, has been finalized yet, DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock said last week.

"It is way, way, way early in the process," she said. "Until we have something to look at it, I think it's too early to say what it will do."

At the center of the uproar is a set of draft proposals that emerged from the department this fall. The draft covered a wide range of issues, from health and safety requirements to setting standards for staffing and employee compensation.

Linda Lawther, president of the Michigan Center for Assisted Living, said if the rules went into effect in their draft form, there is "absolutely no question that this will create more paperwork ... and divert caregivers from patients."

One provision, for instance, would require each home to have a health and safety committee that regularly meets and reports. But that is a one-size-fits-all approach to the regulation of an extremely diverse industry, said Kathleen Murphy, general counsel for the Michigan Assisted Living Association. Adult foster care homes range in size and scope, and serve vastly different populations, she said.

MALA estimates there are about 36,000 residents of adult foster care homes in Michigan and about 14,000 in licensed homes for elderly persons.

Although Murphy says that some of the rule revisions and updates are reasonable, she said there have been no massive scandals or patient tragedies in Michigan group homes that would justify sweeping changes.

She said claims that the rewrite is intended to improve patient care are belied by the inclusion in the draft of reporting waivers for homes that run under a collective bargaining agreement. This

sends a signal to licensees that their troubles will go away if they open the door to labor unions, she said.

Nick Ciaramitaro, a former Macomb County legislator now working as legislative director for the AFSCME, said unionizing the group home workforce would be good for workers and patients.

It is scandalous, he said, that pay and benefits packages for group and nursing home workers, "the people who care for our parents and grandparents, and pretty soon will be caring for us," are less generous than those in the fast food industry. Turnover among group home workers is also very high, he added, with some facilities reporting turnover rates of up to 300% a year.

The industry's defenders said facilities with turnover rates that high are rare, and that rules should be flexible enough to let inspectors focus on specific problems rather than setting rigid standards.

Ron Paradowicz has been managing group homes in Oakland County for a decade and says everyone he knows agrees that minimizing staff turnover is an admirable goal. At his facilities in Wixom and Farmington, Paradowicz estimates that 75% of his employees have been on the job at least a year, and some for a decade or more.

"Right now, we spend a huge amount of time trying to retain staff," he said. "I'm working on that all the time. I have a real problem with the state coming in to tell me how to do something that I am already doing."

DHS spokeswoman Stock said she expects a final draft to be given to a state rulemaking agency within a few weeks. A public comment period and hearing will follow, she said.

"Not everyone will see exactly what they wanted to see. But let's wait until we have something to look at," she said.

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Adult-foster-care homes want to slow rules plan

Friday, November 25, 2005

se@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8554

A group representing adult-foster-care homes and homes for the aged is trying to apply brakes to proposed rules that would impact how those facilities are operated.

A group calling itself the Coalition for Affordable & Quality Care wants the Michigan Department of Human Services and Gov. Jennifer Granholm's administration to slow down the process for approving rules it contends overwhelmingly represent interests of organized labor. The coalition claims it had no knowledge of who proposed the rules or when they were formulated.

Members of the Coalition for Affordable & Quality Care, representing assisted-living providers statewide, recently discussed their concerns with Kalamazoo Gazette editors and reporters. They suggested that the Granholm administration was heavily influenced by union interests in writing the proposed rules.

"In fact, the rules really don't address quality (of care) at all," said Linda I. Lawther, president and CEO of the Michigan Center for Assisted Living in Lansing, a coalition member. "They go more toward workforce issues."

The new rules would impact the 50,000-plus adults in Michigan's assisted-living facilities, including about 120 in Kalamazoo County: Residential Opportunities Inc., Alterra, Fountainview Retirement Village of Portage, Heritage Community of Kalamazoo, Park Place Assisted Living and Sojourner House.

"But there are many, many small ones" with one to three clients, for instance, said Scott Schrum, executive director of Residential Opportunities, Inc.

As outlined, the seven sets of rule changes would require each adult-foster-care facility to establish a health and a safety commission to review and process concerns at each facility, "work that is already required by law," according to group materials. It would also invade worker privacy by requiring information from providers and workers that would become part of public record. Increase costs -- as part of regulatory compliance -- would perhaps impede smaller providers from continuing to operate and favor adult-foster-care providers with collective bargaining agreements between the direct-care employees and the licensee.

The group is not willing to sit and wait for a public hearing on the proposed rules, saying such a hearing would be a "formality" for approval.

In an Oct. 31 letter to Schrum, James B. Gale, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services Office of Children and Adult Licensing, wrote that "the entire rule promulgation process is intended to be completed by April 2006." That had been the time through which coalition members felt they could respond to the rules.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the governor's office, said the process was not closed and that comments could still be filed. She said representatives from the UAW and AFSCME were invited to participate -- though no one from the UAW did -- in the formulating discussions; other participants represented licensees, residents, direct-care advocates and representatives from the

Department of Community Health, Office of Services for the Aging and Office of Children and Adult Licensing.

The group said at least 1,000 letters were mailed to the governor's office, including some from the AARP, asking that more time be given to review the rules. "There was no favorable response to this," Kathleen Murphy, general counsel for the Livonia-based Michigan Assisted Living Association, said of the request.

Coalition representatives said they were surprised to see references in the rules to wage and hourly benefits for employees.

"We haven't seen this language before," Murphy said. "This took us by surprise."

However, she added that "this really isn't about union or nonunion. (This is about moving) away from directed consumer service to administrative (costs)."

Coalition members have alerted state Rep. Jack Hoogendyk, R-Kalamazoo, who sits on the Family and Children Services Committee and the Joint Committee of Administrative Rules, about the proposed rules. From 1994 to 1996, Hoogendyk and his wife ran an adult group home. He is currently a board member for SHALOM, Self Help Alternative Living Opportunities of Michigan.

"Other than suggesting or requesting that the administration reconsider, there is no power that we have to stop them," Hoogendyk said.

"All this is ultimately going to do is, tremendously, I think, raise the cost of care," Hoogendyk said. "It's going to put such an undue burden on these private providers, they're just going to throw up their hands and say, 'I can't do this anymore.' And it's going to be turned over to the state. And when the state does it, it's not going to be done as compassionately ... or as efficiently."

Providers like Sara Collison think the proposed rules would be burdensome and say it's ironic that they could lead back to the same thing they sought to disband years ago -- government oversight and institutionalization. For 18 years, she and her husband, Glen, have been adult foster-care providers, opening their home to 11 adults in foster care, ages 27 to 55.

"Let's not be creating more institutions," Collison said. "Let's keep this family-style that is going to benefit the clients."

The progress of the rules can be accessed online at www.state.mi.us/orr/emi/rules.

Published November 28, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Lawmakers to begin welfare reform debate

By Amy F. Bailey
Associated Press

Lawmakers will begin making decisions on the future of the state's welfare program this week when they return from a two-week recess.

A group of legislators that had been reviewing the current law recently finished its work.

Lawmakers need to address provisions of the law that expire at the end of the year, including sections that spell out which groups can be exempt from work requirements and lay out sanctions for those who aren't complying with work requirements.

Advertisement

But one of the group's leaders, state Rep. Jerry Kooiman, wants more sweeping changes.

Kooiman is among a number of House Republicans who want stiffer penalties for people who do not show up for work or job training and limits on the length of assistance can be awarded.

He said able-bodied adults should be limited to four years of welfare and recipients who don't comply with requirements three times should be prohibited from ever again receiving aid.

But he does not have agreement from the Senate and Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm on those proposals. With only a few weeks of legislative session left before the end of the year, it's unclear whether lawmakers will be able to significantly revamp the complex welfare law or will only address the expiring parts.

Although there are a number of disagreements on the future of the welfare program, Kooiman said there's agreement that recipients need more individual attention to help set goals and figure out how to get the skills needed for jobs that pay more than minimum wage.

Nov 26, 3:11 AM EST

White House Official Seeks Welfare Changes

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press Writer

The administration's point man on tightening welfare requirements says he senses that Congress is closer to making significant changes to the program than at any time during President Bush's tenure.

"I can almost taste it," said Wade Horn, an assistant secretary within the Health and Human Services Department.

Democratic lawmakers don't believe Horn is correct, but say that if he is, the overhaul will occur without bipartisan support.

Bush has proposed that participants work longer hours to maintain eligibility for cash assistance and other forms of aid. He also wants to raise the bar for states by requiring that a greater percentage of their welfare population find work - or the states risk financial penalties.

Since the original legislation calling for changes in welfare expired in 2002, Congress has approved 11 short-term extensions. A more permanent extension requires reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

But lawmakers have been unable to agree on how to do that - mainly because of money.

The House included welfare changes within a bill that reduces government spending by \$50 billion over the next five years. The Senate also approved a bill cutting spending by \$35 billion.

Once negotiators from both chambers bridge the differences, they will submit a final "reconciliation bill" that cannot be filibustered. That means supporters would have to find only 51 votes in the Senate - not 60.

Horn's optimism stems from history. The welfare legislation approved in 1996 was also part of reconciliation legislation that could not be filibustered.

Rep. Sander Levin, D-Mich., noting that 98 Democratic representatives voted for changes to the welfare program back in 1996, said he senses no Democratic support for the legislation passed by the House.

The changes approved in 1996 set limits on how long people could obtain cash assistance. Since the law went into effect, the welfare rolls have dropped from about 4.4 million families to under 2 million.

The president and many lawmakers say, however, that momentum has stalled. Adults don't leave the rolls as easily as they once did. The administration's proposal to change that trend includes new benchmarks that states will have to meet.

Under current law, states are supposed to move 50 percent of adults on welfare into jobs or face financial penalties. However, most states have earned enough credit from earlier reductions in their welfare rolls to avoid the penalties, Horn said.

"About 60 percent of persons on welfare in the last month did not do one hour of any activity related to work or becoming employed," Horn said. "This is stunning. It really is stunning."

The House bill would gradually increase the minimum threshold for states so that 70 percent of their welfare participants would have to be in jobs. Failure to meet that rate could mean the loss

of some of the \$16.6 billion Congress sets aside annually for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grants.

The bill also would change work requirements for individuals. Currently, participants must work at least 20 hours weekly and perform an additional 10 hours of work-related activities, such as job training. The measure approved by the House would require 24 hours of work and 16 hours of additional work-related activities.

"When we talk about work, we mean full-time work, not because we want to be mean, but because we want that person and that family to be lifted out poverty," Horn said. "A focus on part-time work doesn't get you there. A focus on full-time work does."

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that states would face \$8.3 billion in additional costs over five years as a result of the House-approved provisions. Those costs include \$4.2 billion to operate work programs and \$4.1 billion to provide child-care subsidies. The House bill provides an additional \$500 million to help states fund child care.

Levin said his biggest complaint is that the 40-hour requirement would lead to the creation of what he calls "workfare," or jobs that the public sector creates specifically for welfare participants so states meet federal guidelines.

"They don't provide people with the skills, the steps on the ladder that they need to make it today," Levin said.

Sharon Parrott, director of welfare policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said states would face new budget problems if the legislation passes. She said they would have to put up more of their own money, cut programs to pay for welfare-to-work programs, or simply make it as difficult as possible for people to qualify for the program.

Letters for November 28

The Grand Rapids Press

Monday, November 28, 2005

Trapped by bad decisions

I found the article on welfare "trap" interesting ("State targets welfare 'trap,' " Press, Nov. 20). It focused on Martell Hughes, who could not get a job or get off welfare. At 16 she was pregnant, married at 17 and now single with six children.

Between 16 and 39 it seems she lacked responsibility for her own actions. The travesty is that Miss Hughes kept having children at the expense of her children's needs. Could this be why half who leave welfare are back on within a year?

Even if Hughes lands a job, it will not pay enough to take her completely off welfare. "That's the problem with the economy now," Hughes stated. "They're giving us jobs, but only giving us part-time jobs and sticking you with the system."

She says "she wants a full time job that pays enough that gets us away from the system." The problem is not the economy.

Most Americans would have a difficult time financially supporting this many children. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says it takes about \$10,000 a year to raise children to the age of 18.

Hold welfare recipients to standards where poor decisions lead to real and drastic consequences.

Welfare and societal norms lack condemnation for actions that put people in the Welfare system.

Today, if you can't afford a child or children, you get food stamps, subsidized housing, WICK, daycare and welfare. These policies do not work or hold accountability. Taxpayers would be much more likely to support a welfare safety net if they saw that it was for people who hit hard times beyond their control.

Perhaps, solutions should start at home, church and in the local community. Pressure should be put on poor decision making. To make one mistake is human. To make the same mistake again and again without penalty propagates the problem.

TEG BAXTER/Zeeland

Detroit Free Press

Letters to the editor

The poor and elderly shortchanged

November 28, 2005

We are now able to see behind the mask of compassionate conservatism. The House cut more than \$50 billion from social programs such as Medicaid, food stamps and foster care. A \$60-billion tax cut for the wealthy is likely to pass. Congress is taking from the poor, giving to the rich, and leaving those of us in the middle with another \$10-billion deficit. This is fiscally irresponsible and morally reprehensible politics.

On top of that, we are witnessing the systematic destruction of the middle class by corporations like Wal-Mart, Northwest and Delphi Corp. More and more full-time workers will soon be making poverty wages. When will decent Americans wake up, speak up and throw out this shameful government?

Kurt Struckmeyer
Farmington Hills

Medicaid Cutbacks Divide Democrats

House Condemns Provisions Crafted By Governors

By Jonathan Weisman Washington Post Staff Writer

Monday, November 28, 2005; Page A01

Controversial House legislation designed to gain control of Medicaid growth has split Democrats, with lawmakers in Washington united in their opposition while Democratic governors are quietly supporting the provisions and questioning the party's reflexive denunciations.

The Medicaid provisions have become a flashpoint for the opposition of Democrats -- and some moderate Republicans -- to the \$50 billion budget-cutting bill that narrowly passed the House last week. The provisions would reduce Medicaid spending by \$12 billion through 2010 and \$48 billion over the next decade, in part by making it difficult for more affluent seniors to transfer their assets to relatives, then plead poverty to get Medicaid to pay for them to stay in nursing homes.

But the measures would also save \$2.4 billion over five years by allowing state governments to impose higher health insurance deductibles, co-payments and premiums on poor Medicaid recipients, including, for the first time, impoverished children and pregnant women. An additional \$3.9 billion would be saved by relaxing mandated preventive health care and screening of children and pregnant women.

The changes would trim just 1.7 percent from a program expected to spend nearly \$2.8 trillion through 2015, but the proposals have prompted bitter condemnation from congressional Democrats.

"As the number of people without health insurance has increased for four years in a row, Republicans are charging ahead with \$45 billion in cuts to Medicaid -- the health insurance program that provides medical care to America's poorest children and many of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) thundered Nov. 18, just before the pre-dawn passage of the bill. "Republicans give new meaning to the words 'suffer little children.' "

What she did not say is that those changes were proposed over the summer by a bipartisan task force of governors, led by Virginia's Mark R. Warner, whose popularity in a Republican state has made him a rising star in the Democratic Party.

In fact, the most controversial provisions in the House bill were adapted almost word for word from a document drafted by Govs. Warner, Tom Vilsack (D-Iowa), Haley Barbour (R-Miss.), Janet Napolitano (D-Ariz.), Mike Huckabee (R-Ark.), Jennifer M. Granholm (D-Mich.), Dirk Kempthorne (R-Idaho), Jim Doyle (D-Wis.), Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), and Edward G. Rendell (D-Pa.), said Ray Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association.

"The House has worked very closely with us," Scheppach said. "From our standpoint, Republicans and Democrats saw this very similarly at the state level."

The split has underscored the differing interests of Democrats in Washington -- out of power and struggling to capitalize on the declining popularity of their adversaries -- and Democratic governors, who take a more pragmatic approach. For governors, the soaring costs of Medicaid

threaten to swamp state financing. Already, tens of thousands of people have been thrown off the Medicaid rolls in states such as Tennessee and Missouri, and governors have warned that those cuts will grow deeper if they do not have the flexibility to trim benefits more rationally.

So where Washington Democrats hope to highlight the partisan divide, their gubernatorial counterparts outside the Beltway have emphasized pragmatism and moderation, not only in the way they have governed but in their political campaigns.

That split -- over policy and style -- could come increasingly into focus as potential presidential contenders outside Washington, such as Warner, clash with congressional contenders, such as Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), as they jockey for position ahead of the 2008 White House race.

For now, Democratic governors have been willing to voice their opposition to the broader budget-cutting bill, attacking provisions that cut child support enforcement, narrow eligibility for foster care and adoption assistance, and impose stricter work requirements on welfare recipients with only modest increases in child care assistance.

"The president and his friends on Capitol Hill have put together a budget that does not reflect the values of everyday Americans," said New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, chairman of the Democratic Governors Association.

But they have conspicuously steered clear of the Medicaid debate that will continue to rage into next month, as House negotiators push their Medicaid provisions in conference with a wary Senate.

Thomas S. Kahn, the Democratic staff director of the House Budget Committee, said Democrats are unified on one point: Savings from changes to the Medicaid system should be used to strengthen health care for the poor, not pay for tax cut extensions that congressional Republicans hope to pass when they return in December.

"All Democrats agree strongly that cuts in Medicaid, especially those that hurt poor beneficiaries, should not be used to pay for tax cuts, especially those geared toward those at the top," Kahn said.

And gubernatorial support for the Medicaid changes may not be universal. In an Aug. 31 letter, Gov. Ted Kulongoski of Oregon implored Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) to oppose increased cost-sharing, especially for Medicaid recipients below the poverty line.

But Kahn and liberal activists acknowledged the fissure with governors is real.

The division stems in part from long-standing fears that if Washington gives states too much latitude over federal programs, some governors will go too far. Under the House bill, the \$3 co-payment for Medicaid recipients below the poverty level would be allowed to rise annually with the medical inflation rate. For the first time, states would be allowed to refuse care for patients who refuse to pay.

States would also be allowed to charge co-payments, premiums or deductibles for visits to hospital emergency rooms for non-emergency care and for expensive prescription drugs not on a list of preferred medications.

What really worries liberal policy groups is a measure allowing states to impose any co-payment they want on Medicaid recipients who are above the poverty line, typically the working poor. Those fees are supposed to remain below 5 percent of beneficiaries' total incomes, but policy experts say that cap will be impossible to enforce. Most working poor will not be able to track their annual medical expenses to that degree of specificity.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that by 2015, 11 million Medicaid beneficiaries -- half of them children -- will face fees they do not face today. About 80 percent of

the cost savings from the bill would come not from the premiums and co-payments but from poor people no longer seeking medical attention.

Scheppach allowed that experiences do indicate higher fees might keep some people from seeking needed health care. But, he said, Congress should trust the governors to use the proposed changes wisely.

"We think governors are going to use these measures in a positive way, steering people away from emergency to non-emergency care or getting them drugs that are more affordable," he said, adding that if nothing is done about Medicaid costs, even more people will be cut from the Medicaid rolls entirely. "These are good policies for the long run."

Choosing Medicare drug plan is a chore

Monday, November 28, 2005

By Juanita Westaby
The Grand Rapids Press

After 54 years of marriage, Clarence and Shirley Brooks have found a reason to split up. His Celebrex. Her Synthroid. His Norvase. Her Detrol LA.

The new Medicare prescription drug plan will most likely mean they have to join separate programs, since different companies will offer some drugs, but not others, the couple recently found.

In the crush to get 66,000 Kent County seniors signed up by May 15, those who work with senior citizens say they are looking at a sea of choices for prescription drugs.

The caveat to all this choice is that drug companies are exercising their choice, too. By federal law, they only have to offer two drugs in each class.

Seniors who expect to find all of their necessary prescriptions will have to look hard.

To find all of the drugs their spouse needs as well, that may take a miracle. In fact, Jo Murphy of the Area Agency on Aging, tells seniors not to even try. She is spending a lot of time these days at seminars such as the one Clarence Brooks attended at the Yankee Clipper Library on the Northeast Side.

Using a laptop computer and a projection screen, Murphy attempted to walk seniors through the government's Web site. Part of the Medicare site does the drug program searching for seniors who list their prescription drugs. It comes up with a comparison between two or three of the more than 100 drug plans available, explaining monthly premiums as well as included and excluded drugs.

The problem with the comparison is that it was "put together by people who cut their teeth on a computer mouse," she said.

She told the seniors that if they aren't computer savvy, they need to enlist someone who is.

"The only way to get this benefit is to take action," she said.

The ordinary ways seniors access help, such as the Area Agency on Aging, are overwhelmed with calls, she said. Her own agency went from 50 calls a week to 50 calls per day.

"There are 66,000 people in Kent County eligible for this and, my volunteers, as good as they are, can't do this for every one of you," she said.

It will be the same story at the doctor's office, Murphy said. "Those offices are going to have less time."

And getting drugs from Canada is a fast-disappearing possibility.

"It's illegal to import drugs from another country, and we may be closing those borders down," she said.

After four decades with the railroad, Brooks pays \$600 a month toward his health insurance, and he was hoping he would be able to keep both his wife and himself on the same plan. Like every other senior, he will have to gather up his and her drugs and check them against computer lists.

He has veteran's benefits for most of his drugs, but that does not touch Shirley's.

"If I don't have to switch, I won't, because they've been paying pretty good," Brooks said.

LOCAL COMMENT: State must protect kids

Detroit Free Press

November 28, 2005

BY LAUREN HAGER

The Michigan Office of Children's Ombudsman is dying on the vine and the people of this state need to do something about it.

This small office, nestled away in a downtown Lansing high-rise, is the last vestige of accountability for the proper care and protection of kids in this state who are at risk of being abused and neglected. These children are being tossed into a safety net that could have holes big enough to leave scars that will carry into future generations.

I first became acquainted with the ombudsman's office while I was serving my first year in the Michigan House of Representatives. Within a little more than a year, I had two 2-year-olds die in my Port Huron-area legislative district, one through neglect and one through abuse.

Michigan's extensive net of protection -- both laws and programs -- seemingly failed these two youngsters and I wanted to know why. I asked the ombudsman to investigate the state's role in protecting both of them.

One of the children was Ariana Swinson, who was brutally killed by her mom and dad in front of her siblings. After living in the loving and protective environment provided by her aunt and uncle, the state decided to return Ariana to her parents.

And it was the ombudsman's report of the investigation into Ariana's death that started me on a five-year journey to have the powers of that office strengthened to make it more effective in keeping our child-protection bureaucracy accountable.

In trying to find answers to why Ariana was returned to her parents, I found that the then Michigan Family Independence Agency -- which is now the Michigan Department of Human Services -- had set up a steel cone of silence about protection cases.

Queries about cases and decision-making that went into them were met with stone-cold silence, the usual excuse being the need for confidentiality.

Legislators and the public were confined to bureaucratic responses that they should just trust the workers and the courts to make the best decisions.

Meanwhile, the human toll on youngsters who were beaten and killed continued.

During the final days of the last legislative session, my bill, Ariana's Law, was passed, but only after some very weakening amendments. Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed it into law.

One of the goals of the new law was to further remove the ombudsman's office from the pushes and pulls of politics. It was vital that the ombudsman have free rein within certain boundaries to investigate complaints. And this was to be done without political influence or pressure.

A past administration viewed the ombudsman's office as being under its direct control, and there were serious concerns about the office trying to hide cases and findings.

The new law retained the governor's right to appoint the ombudsman, but it tried to ensure that a new appointee would be qualified by training and experience and would have to be approved with the advice and consent of the Senate.

New legal tools were added to make the ombudsman more effective in searching for facts about how a child-protection case was handled by the state.

At the bill signing, the governor assured those present that the changes were important and that she would implement them to save kids.

Well, the ombudsman's position has been vacant since May and there's no talk about filling it. Meanwhile, the office is barely hanging on. It is operating in a leadership vacuum, moving it closer and closer to being ineffective.

It is waiting for an independent child-protection advocate, somebody who can run interference for those who have no prospect of doing it for themselves.

The ombudsman's position needs to be filled now with somebody who can:

Effectively advocate for abused and neglected kids and for their protection.

Courageously investigate a bureaucracy that often doesn't want to be second-guessed or have somebody look over its shoulder.

Serve as a catalyst for change when the child-protection system needs it, especially with the Legislature, the schools and other groups.

Michigan's vulnerable kids deserve the best protection we can give them.

The responsibility for the next move lies with Gov. Granholm to appoint a qualified and effective ombudsman.

At-risk kids in Michigan need an effective voice in Lansing, someone who may be their only lifeline to a future where there is hope.

LAUREN HAGER is a former state representative from St. Clair County. Write to him in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit 48226.

Mother charged with murder

Friday, November 25, 2005

By Ken Kolker
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Hector Cisneros visited his 2-year-old daughter's grave after learning the girl's mother had been charged with killing her.

He didn't celebrate Thanksgiving Day, but he and his new wife were still thankful -- that the alleged killer of little Aiyana Cisneros didn't get to celebrate, either.

"She got to spend Thanksgiving in jail," said Cisneros' wife, Angela Cisneros. "As mean as it sounds, we're grateful for that. We don't think she should get to spend it with her family if we don't get to spend it with our daughter."

Aiyana's mother, Samantha Pauline Winkler, 20, was to be arraigned today in Grand Rapids District Court on a charge of second-degree murder in the July 19 slaying.

Grand Rapids police arrested her Wednesday at a relative's home near Rockford after obtaining a warrant. She was being held at the Kent County Jail.

The girl was found dead at 427 Curtis St. NE, in the home where she lived with her mother and her mother's 20-year-old boyfriend.

Aiyana died of repeated blows to her chest and abdomen, which led to internal bleeding, police have said. Her death certificate shows she was injured two days before she died.

Angela Cisneros, the girl's stepmother, said she and her husband expected an arrest, but they didn't believe the mother would face a murder charge.

Aiyana occasionally stayed with her father and stepmother.

"We knew she was going to get something out of it," she said of the girl's mother. "We thought maybe she would be charged with manslaughter. We thought maybe she was there and she didn't protect her.

"There's nothing that that little girl could have done so horrible," she said.

Police said they had investigated a complaint of possible abuse several weeks before the death after emergency room doctors found a bruise near the girl's pelvis. The girl was returned to her mother after police and protective services workers found no evidence of abuse, police said.

A neighbor said Aiyana looked groggy and "flu-like" the day before she died. The mother, who didn't have a car, declined the neighbor's offer to drive Aiyana to the hospital, the neighbor said. Before 10 a.m. the next day, the neighbor said she got a call from Winkler.

Aiyana was alone on the couch when the neighbor found her, she said. She wasn't breathing, had no pulse and her lips were blue. The neighbor said she called 911 while a friend gave the girl CPR.

On Wednesday, Hector and Angela Cisneros visited Aiyana's grave at Fairplains Cemetery in Northeast Grand Rapids and stood near the headstone they bought with money from a fundraiser.

"We feel that finally, after four months, justice is starting to be served," she said. "Maybe our daughter can sleep better in her grave."

Doctor defends couple

Thursday, November 24, 2005

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The defense opened Wednesday for a Kentwood couple accused of abusing their adopted children with a pediatrician who said he saw no signs of corporal punishment injuries in the children he examined.

Beryl and Jerome Richards are accused of physically abusing 12 of their adopted children. The children have also testified that the couple knew some of them were being sexually assaulted, but did nothing to stop it.

Dr. Richard Wood testified that he examined three of the younger children in April after Protective Services got involved. He was searching for injuries related to corporal punishment. "I found no evidence, marks or anything, that were consistent with any form of physical abuse at that time," Wood said.

The jury is to decide whether Family Court Judge Nanaruth Carpenter should take jurisdiction over the children as part of the prosecution's effort to revoke the couple's parental rights.

Just a few years ago, the couple were named adoptive parents of the year by Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association.

But earlier this year, 12 of the 13 adopted children still living in the house were removed. During Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Vicki Seidl's presentation, children testified that they were given "licks" from leather belts, extension cords and wooden sticks.

Wood, the doctor, testified Wednesday that the mother, Beryl, told him that she had spanked children with a belt for "misbehaving" the week before the visit. The doctor said the child mentioned the belt spanking at school, which spurred Protective Services' intervention.

Wood said he told the mother she shouldn't use an object for spanking the kids because people can't gauge how hard they're hitting the children.

"With a hand, you can feel what you're doing," he said.

Wood noted a variety of ailments in the three children, such as behavioral disorders and sleep disturbance. He also testified that one child suffered from a skin condition that can be mistaken for bruising.

One charge against Whitfield dismissed

Trace Christenson

The Enquirer

A former day-care provider will go to trial next month in the 2003 death of an infant. But one charge against Melissa Whitfield was dismissed Wednesday.

Calhoun County Circuit Court Judge Conrad Sindt dismissed a child abuse charge against Whitfield, 26, in the Oct. 27, 2003, death of Blake Wilson, 12 weeks old. However, Whitfield still faces a charge of manslaughter and if convicted could face up to 15 years in prison. Sindt heard several pre-trial motions Wednesday afternoon and denied a motion by Defense Attorney Susan Mladenoff to dismiss all charges, but did agree to drop the child abuse charge. The child stopped breathing and died after being placed in a swing at the former Melissa's Daycare, 235 Eldred St., which was closed by the state of Michigan after the child's death. Prosecutors have alleged that Whitfield left the child alone for up to 20 minutes despite knowing that the boy could not hold up his head. Pathologists determined that the boy died of positional asphyxiation. Mladenoff argued that the

boy died because of ordinary negligence rather than gross negligence, which is required to convict someone of manslaughter.

But Assistant Prosecutor Dierdre Ford argued that a jury could find gross negligence because Whitfield should have known the child could not hold his head up.

"Her legal duty was to provide adequate proper care and keep the child safe and secure. If she watched that child as she was supposed to, he would not be dead."

The trial is scheduled to begin Dec. 6.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com

Originally published
November 24, 2005

An appropriate child protection

Saginaw News

Friday, November 25, 2005

State Rep. John Moolenaar has stepped into a fray that won't endear him to libertarians and militant smokers who view laws restricting smoking as Nanny State intrusions.

The Midland Republican introduced a bill this month making it illegal to smoke in a vehicle with a child passenger. If passed, the bill would allow police to ticket adults who expose children to secondhand smoke in a car.

The best solution is for parents to quit smoking. But if they can't, they at least should not expose their children to the dangers of secondhand smoke -- especially in the tight confines of a vehicle. Secondhand smoke causes up to 300,000 additional cases of upper respiratory illnesses in children a year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Exposure in the confinement of a car increases those risks. Toddler's lungs are severely affected by exposure, according to the EPA, since they are still developing physically and have higher breathing rates than adults.

Baby boomers who remember the bluish haze and nausea on trips with dad or another family member chain-smoking can appreciate the need for restrictions. That was a generation that wasn't familiar with the dangers of secondhand smoke.

This generation, however, knows the risks of exposure to secondhand smoke, which contains traces of more than 40 carcinogens.

Moolenaar will hear the wrath of militant smokers for proposing the in-car smoking restriction, but he shouldn't cave. This and future generations of children should have smoke-free rides. Making mom or dad pull over for a smoke every few miles might even prod a few to quit.

Livingston warms to clothing program

Response from volunteers and needy families grows

Sunday, November 27, 2005

BY LISA CAROLIN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Warm The Children is growing in Livingston County.

The program that provides winter clothing to children in need is in its ninth year and the response - from families in need, donors and volunteer shoppers - continues to grow.

Warm The Children, which is sponsored by The Ann Arbor News, solicits donations from readers and 100 percent of the money donated goes to buy clothing. The News pays for all administrative costs.

The program matches families with volunteer shoppers, many from local service clubs and churches, who meet each family at Meijer store to buy \$80 worth of winter clothing for each child. Overall in Livingston and Washtenaw counties, program coordinator Catherine O'Donnell says 1,600 children will be helped, with about one third of those from Livingston County.

O'Donnell says she has seen an increase in the number of church and service groups that have stepped forward to help in Livingston County as the number of families seeking assistance in the county has also increased.

The Rev. Jay Tyler, from the Church of Christ in Brighton, says volunteers at the church started shopping with families this week.

"We got a wonderful response from our members and have about 30 families that we're taking shopping," says Tyler. "Our volunteers are excited about being involved and helping people in our own community."

For several years, Oak Pointe Country Club in Genoa Township has been a major fundraiser for the program in Livingston County.

Michelle Breneau-Spencer, Oak Pointe's membership director, coordinated a Coat Tails and Cocktails event Oct. 22 that raised more than \$9,000 this year - the event's largest total to date. That translates to helping 112 area children.

Hamburg Township resident Lori Hall has been working with members at Oak Pointe Country Club along with a number of friends to coordinate shopping trips with families for Warm The Children.

"I wanted something I could do with my kids, and this is a personal way for them to get involved and go shopping with me and a family," says Hall. "We did it last year and got to know several families, which has been a rewarding experience for us."

"I came to realize that there are so many people in our own communities and neighborhoods that need help and assistance, and the shoppers are grateful for the opportunity to help the people in our community."

Overall, Warm The Children has close to 500 volunteers and raises an average of \$142,000 a year from readers and other donors.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lcarolin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at (810) 844-2010.

Warming the children

Sunday, November 27, 2005

Winter doesn't officially arrive until Dec. 21, but it was no autumnal breeze that brought us our Thanksgiving Day weather. It was a bitterly cold wind more typical of mid-winter.

That being so, let's capitalize on that weather to remind us all of the Warm the Children campaign. Indeed, folks apparently need a reminder, for this year's giving has been lagging.

In 2004 at this point, 251 donors had given a total of \$35,605; this year, by Friday, 213 donors had given \$21,847. Thus, both the number of donors and per-donor amounts are down. And at this rate, last year's campaign total of \$63,308.60 will be difficult to match or exceed for 2005.

However, we won't be guilty of underestimating the generosity of this community. So let's review why this program is important. Warm the Children is sponsored by the Jackson Citizen Patriot, the Community Action Agency and the Jackson Junior Welfare League. The primary purpose is to raise enough money to buy warm clothing for about 600 needy children. This year, there's a more specific purpose within that broad general goal -- to give priority to children displaced to Jackson by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

There are two ways to help -- by contributing to the fund, and by volunteering to help families shop for the funded clothing. To make a monetary gift, drop it off at our business office or mail it to the Citizen Patriot, 214 S. Jackson St., Jackson MI 49201. To sign up as a volunteer, call 768-4839.

--The Jackson Citizen Patriot

Warm the Children

Sunday, November 27, 2005

Ann Arbor News

What: A program sponsored by The News that uses reader donations to buy winter clothing for needy children. The News pays all administrative costs, so a dollar donated is a dollar for a child.

When: Each autumn.

Amount raised since Nov. 13: \$29,710.

To donate: Please send a check to Warm the Children, c/o The Ann Arbor News, P.O. Box 1147, Ann Arbor MI, 48106-1147.

For more information:

(734) 994-6733 or access www.mlive.com/aanews/warm/.

Lansing State Journal

November 28, 2005

Letters

Put children first

As a children's advocate and concerned citizen, I have been watching the congressional budget bills with great concern.

The House budget bill provides for \$70 billion in tax breaks, mostly for the wealthiest Americans, while jeopardizing the ability of many children to obtain adequate health care, preventive services and foster care, child support payments, child support and nutrition programs.

Federal tax cuts at a time of record deficits are unconscionable. Making the tax cuts at the cost of our children's current and future well-being is unthinkable. I urge you to gather information about this issue and then contact your representative and let him or her know that the house budget bill, as written, should be defeated.

Carol A. Siemon
East Lansing

News

Third Adoption Day

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News

Wednesday, November 23, 2005 10:51 AM EST

CASSOPOLIS - Faith and Mike Cameron, both 45, always talked about taking a cruise for their 25th wedding anniversary.

Instead, they piled their burgeoning second family into a camper and traveled to Brown County, Ind.

The Niles couple, who met in a church youth group at 17, already raised three children before becoming foster parents 2 1/2 years ago.

They have adopted four children, with plans to finalize adoptions of two other foster children in their care.

In all, the Cameron household contains six youngsters 9 or younger.

They are finding their second ride on the parenting merry-go-round as satisfying - if not more so - than the first, they said while attending Cass County's program Tuesday for the third annual Michigan Adoption Day sponsored by the state Department of Human Services (DHS) and the state Supreme Court.

The Camerons witnessed two adoptions before Judge Susan L. Dobrich, who presides over Circuit Court Family Division, one of a preschool girl in a frilly pink dress to a Decatur family, reuniting her with an older half-sister.

"We try to keep siblings together," said Tamela Phillips, Cass County DHS adoption specialist.

She has been the caseworker on three of the Camerons four adoptions.

"We've had 74 adoptions this year," Dobrich said. "That's more than one a week. If every county did as many as we did, that would be almost 6,000" permanent homes.

Cass County DHS Director Chris Kadulski estimated that statewide 270 children would be adopted in 40 counties.

That number has increased from 25 the former prosecutor's first year on the bench a decade ago. Each adoption ceremony includes a personalized cake from Felpausch in Dowagiac.

Usually somber court proceedings were further pushed aside by the presence of a clown furnished by the family.

"We like to come every year," Faith said. "It helps our kids know how important this is for those who have been through it, and it helps the others know it's coming for them. We'll be able to

finalize on them soon, and we just celebrate the adoptions. We finalized one in September and one in October of this year, and then one in January, so we actually finalized three (in 2005) at different times.”

Nicole is 8; Tara is 3 1/2; Meredith is 23 months old; and Thomas is 18 months old.

“I think it actually helped us that we knew what we were getting into,” Faith said. “We’ve been there. We’ve been through nasty teen years. We’ve been through sickness and everything else. We kind of changed our lifestyles to just suit the kids. This is short-term, it doesn’t last forever. We dropped some commitments. Everything we do, we do as a family and that just works for us. One of our biggest changes was buying a 15-passenger van. That’s the biggest challenge - learning to back that van up into parking spaces.”

“The first daughter we adopted was 4,” Faith said. “We thought, ‘I think we can do this,’ and we weren’t done being parents. We took her in, then it seemed a shame to have a 4-year-old without other kids. ‘We ought to get into foster care.’ Then, as the kids were available and we thought we loved them, we couldn’t imagine life without them, so we might as well keep them. No, there was no plan at all. I think basically we’ll adopt as many as the state of Michigan will allow. I think there’s a cap at eight children. Two more? I don’t know. We may not have others. We’ve taken it as the Lord brings them, loving them and keeping them. If not, we’ll love them and let them go to where they need to go. Whatever happens, happens.”

The Cameron’s grown children are ages 24, 22 and 20. They also have a grandson.

“We kind of fight” the perception that they are grandparents raising children when they have a grandson, too. “A lot of times people assume we are their grandparents,” Faith said, “and we don’t want them to feel like they don’t have parents. They have grandparents and parents, and we’re definitely the parents.

“Actually, it’s been a great fit for us. We don’t feel like we’re doing anything great. We love them, they’re a part of us and we can’t imagine letting them go,” she said. “When we got into the foster system we thought it would just be playmates for Nicole. We have a huge extended family, but not a lot of kids that age, so the family was all for it: ‘You can’t get rid of them. Why would you get rid of them?’ Two of my kids live in town and they have been very supportive. One lives in Alabama. They are respite workers and watch the kids. My older daughter cleans my house. My mother does my laundry. I have a lot of really supportive people. There’s no way I could do it all by myself.”

“I want to give them the permanency they don’t have,” Faith said. “A lot of them have been in the system for so long, it takes them a while to realize this is forever, but it’s a good challenge. They need someone to feel like, ‘No matter what you put me through, buddy, you’re here. You’re mine.’ They thrive with that. They just want to be loved.”

Mike coaches Optimist soccer, which is a new experience for him.

“I’m not very good at it,” he confessed, “but I’m trying.”

The 9-year-old foster son (the foster daughter is 6) is starting to play basketball.

"It's better" the second time around, he said. "You're not as high-strung. We pick our battles and we're a little more relaxed, I think," said the salesman for Express Press.

Energizing him is the "fulfillment we get from knowing we're taking care of children. That's what it's about. All the rest of the stuff is necessary, but it's not front-and-center anymore," Mike said of the reordering of his priorities.

"I think we're doing it for the right reasons," though it took him longer to come around to the idea than his wife, he admits.

"That's the kind of stuff that keeps you moving and going," Faith said. "You don't think about cruises, you think about how many people can you put in a hotel with a pool for a vacation."

"The neatest thing for us" is their support system, she said.

"We have phenomenal friends through our church. When you take six kids to Wal-Mart" - she chooses her words carefully - "people notice you. But it doesn't feel like a huge undertaking. It's just our life. I'm just thankful they're not in wheelchairs. That would be too much for me. We live in an old house" her grandfather built to raise seven children.

"They share rooms, they share toys, they share everything but beds. They all have their own beds and dressers," Faith said. "There's the fulfillment you get from being a parent, then there's also the fulfillment you get from knowing you're meeting a need in the community. Also, we're back into the school system again. You have another voice in the community. We're involved in things again that we had kind of gotten out of because our kids were grown. To me, that's a great thing. It's busy, but I like it."

Published November 28, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Monday's letters to the editor

Remember children

On Nov. 15, my girlfriend and I went to the opening of the Michigan Heart Gallery show, featured in a Nov. 14 LSJ story, at the Capitol Rotunda. The photographs were beautiful and the accompanying stories of the children's personalities, both adopted and unadopted, were touching and inspiring.

It was an interaction with one of the featured kids, though, that showed us what this event was all about - the generous and caring hearts of these young people in need.

On our way out, I felt a hand on my arm. I turned to find a boy whom I recognized from one of the photos. He was carrying two roses. "Quick," he whispered urgently, "give this to her."

He handed me a rose and ran off, laughing.

Sam Esquith
East Lansing

Monday, November 28, 2005

Plymouth-Canton annual food drive gets competitive

Students at 3 high schools go to great lengths to win interschool contest, help feed hungry Metro Detroiters.

Amy Kuras / Special to The Detroit News

CANTON TOWNSHIP-- The three high schools at Plymouth-Canton Educational Park have collected 7,000 cans of food for the needy in an annual fundraising competition aimed at reinforcing the importance of community service.

Plymouth High School won the interschool competition, and the Canley Cup -- a play on the Stanley Cup hockey championship trophy -- went to Plymouth High School Spanish teacher Alicia Maturen. For the second consecutive year, her students brought in the most cans -- more than 1,100, which will help the Salvation Army feed hungry Metro Detroiters.

The bulk of those cans, Maturen said, came from her second- and third-hour classes. Many of those students had been in last year's winning classes and wanted to beat each other in this year's competition.

"They started this crazy competition with each other," he said. "They would come in and would look at each other's numbers. Kids would show up with a vanload of ramen noodles. It was just insanity."

The final tally was more than 600 cans from second hour, and more than 400 from third. Last year, her classes brought in a little more than 600 cans total, so the fierce competition benefited the Salvation Army by nearly doubling the collection of cans.

Competition grew very intense in the last hours of the drive, said junior Austin Barnett. In his third-hour class, students decided to collect money -- and he went bargain shopping. On the last day of the drive, the third-hour class was ahead; but then the second-hour class apparently had the same idea to collect money and shop and pulled ahead at the last minute.

"The competition was fun, and it was good knowing that we could help people while we were doing it," Austin said.

School food drives are common throughout Wayne County at this time of the year.

At Churchill High School in Livonia, the annual canned food drive brings in more than 40,000 cans of food, which are given to the Livonia Goodfellows to help needy families in Livonia and Westland. The drive provides between 80 percent and 85 percent of the canned food the

Goodfellows distribute during the holidays, said Bill Halvangis, activities director at Churchill.

Led by the student council, Churchill's 2,300 students collect the food. That's one of the largest -- if not the largest -- can collections of any school in the state, he said.

While the canned food drives benefit people in the community, it benefits the students as well to get involved in these kinds of charitable activities, said Halvangis. "It's the right thing to do: to teach values and some sensitivity to the plight of others," he said.

Like the Plymouth food drive, Churchill's often doesn't really get rolling until pretty late in the game.

"We'll think we're so far behind on Thursday, I'll think we cannot make it," Halvangis said.

"Folks dig deep and do their best and suddenly they have done it."

Donations to local organizations that help needy people are down, in large part because of the huge outpouring of help for hurricane relief and the South Asian tsunami and earthquake. Add in

recent bad news from the auto companies about downsizing, and donations from schools become that much more important, said Russ Russell, director of development for the eastern Michigan Salvation Army.

"They not only help us help families with food baskets and all that, but we also provide over 7,000 meals every single day to homeless people and people who live in our centers," he said. Canned food contributions help with those meals.

In addition to the holiday canned food drives, Russell is looking for schools to sell wristbands, similar to the trendy brightly colored ones championing other causes. Student groups can sell the wristbands for \$2, with proceeds going to the Salvation Army. Wristbands were used as a hurricane relief fund-raiser, and Russell hopes to sell the rest to boost the organization's coffers for local efforts as well. Donations that would typically go to the organization's local efforts have been diverted to other needs this year, Russell said.

"We can attribute to that about \$2 million that would typically go to us has gone overseas," he said. "We're making special pleas to our donors and people who may not have given in the past to help our local friends and family in the area."

How to help

Livonia Goodfellows
P.O. Box 51982
Livonia, MI 48151
(313) 438-0862

The annual newspaper sale to benefit Christmas baskets for children is Saturday, Dec. 3.
Salvation Army

16130 Northland Drive
Southfield, MI 48075
(248) 443-5500

School organizations interested in selling wristbands should contact Russ Russell at the Salvation Army.

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Free turkeys go to 835 homes

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Thursday, November 24, 2005

By Matt Bach
mbach@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6330

FLINT - More than 800 Flint families will have a turkey on their dinner table today thanks to a local restaurant and more than 40 businesses that donated to the effort.

Captain Coty's Family Restaurant in Flint and several other sponsors gave away 835 turkeys to students from 11 Flint schools.

It was by far the largest turkey giveaway since the program was begun by retired Flint schoolteacher John Ribner about 40 years ago. The giveaway was made possible through \$7,000 in donations given by about 50 Genesee County businesses, Ribner said.

The students and their families were brought to the restaurant on schools buses to receive the turkeys in Captain Coty's parking lot, 1252 N. Ballenger Road.

"They go to the most needy children in Flint city schools," Ribner said.

"When I was in my third year of teaching at Holmes (Middle School), a lady walked out of the school office crying. She had asked if they had any cans of food, but the school couldn't help.

"I said, 'This is it, here's my chance.' I came up with the idea that from now on, we would pass out turkeys. That first year we started with 15 turkeys."

The group gave out 380 turkeys last year, but that number has been more than doubled this year, Ribner said.

"I've been amazed how fantastic this county is and how terrific people are," he said.

Flint School Superintendent Walter Milton Jr., school board member Herbert Cleaves, Genesee County Sheriff Robert J. Pickell and others helped hand out the turkeys, Ribner said.

Some of the major sponsors include George and Woody Skaff of Skaff Furniture & Carpet Co., Joe and Dela Berishaj of Captain Coty's and WFBE-FM (95.1).

QUICK TAKE

About the turkey giveaway A program to give turkeys to needy Flint families raised \$7,000 this year and gave out a record 835 turkeys. Event organizers hope to give out even more turkeys next year.

To donate to next year's effort, call Captain Coty's Family Restaurant at (810) 232-5820 or Skaff Furniture & Carpet Co. at (810) 767-1380.

Ann Arbor church aims to feed body and soul Involvement with apartment residents isn't limited to Thanksgiving

Friday, November 25, 2005

BY TOM GANTERT

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Andy Jones sat in front of the big screen TV in the lounge of the Miller Manor Apartments watching football with a plate full of Thanksgiving food.

At 63, the resident of the low-income housing complex said he's been on kidney dialysis for 16 years and said he probably didn't have the doctor's approval for some of the food provided by the Second Baptist Church of Ann Arbor this holiday.

"But I told my doctor that since my kidneys failed, my knees are weak, my eyes are waning, my hearing is waning and my back is gone and my sex drive is gone ... you are not taking my food. That's all I have left.

"What would be the purpose of living?" Jones said. Then he took another bite of turkey.

"I love it. This is good food."

The Second Baptist Church, located a couple of blocks from the apartment complex, served a Thanksgiving dinner at 1 p.m. Thursday.

The church gives a weekly service for the 105 residents at the apartment complex, at 727 Miller Road. The Rev. Yolanda Whiten, the church's associate minister, said residents approached last week and asked if the church could also put on a Thanksgiving meal for the first time.

Led by Whiten, a group of 20 church volunteers served the food. Whiten said about 35 members of her church helped prepare the meal, which included three turkeys, two hams, six dozen rolls and macaroni and cheese.

"Every member of the church I called was like, 'What time do you need it?' " Whiten said. "There was no way I could have done it by myself."

She paused to sit down. Whiten had been running around since 8:30 a.m. After five hours, she was asked to reflect on why she was doing it. "This is what Jesus did," she said.

Marty Strange, a member of the Miller Manor residents organization, said the dinner was more than just a meal.

He's part of the group that plans events to keep residents involved, interacting and mentally alert. They have movies, Bingo and weekday lunches.

But nothing like Thursday's meals that brought 30 to 40 people together in one setting for a large, home-cooked meal. Strange said he was most pleased in seeing normally reclusive residents come out of their shells.

"You normally only see these people every three or four months," Strange said.

As one resident finished her meal and pushed herself back to her apartment in a wheelchair, she passed Whiten.

"I was supposed to go to New York," Dorothy Parker told Whiten. "But I said, 'No.' Thank you."

"We are the ones who are blessed," Whiten replied.

Second Baptist Pastor Mark Lyons said the event is central to the church's mission.

"It represents what the church is supposed to be doing," Lyons said. "Our job is to go out in the community and share the love of Jesus Christ. On a holiday like this, it's nice to let them know somebody thought enough of them that they could just come down and be served."

As the dinner came to a close, Lyons told the residents it would be an annual event.

They broke out in applause.

"We consider you family," Lyons told them.

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State provides county with 'domestic violence prosecutor'

Roscommon County has been chosen as one of three participating counties in a state grant that will provide each county with a prosecuting attorney dedicated solely to the prosecution of domestic violence cases.

Through the Michigan Attorney General's Office, the grant provides a special Attorney General to come to Roscommon County and prosecute cases involving crimes between individuals that had an ongoing or prior "intimate relationship." These cases can involve domestic violence assault and batteries, malicious destruction of property, felonious assaults, personal protection order violations, and even up to a charge of murder.

The "domestic violence prosecutor" is provided to Roscommon County for up to two years at no cost to the county. Roscommon County has no obligation for payments of any salary, benefits, or matching funds. There is no continuing duty to fund the position at the end of the grant cycle.

The domestic violence prosecutor position is held by Bonita Hoffman. Hoffman will cover the same duties in Kalkaska and Otsego Counties. Hoffman is a former assistant prosecuting attorney from Monroe County with over 10 years experience. Hoffman has specialized in the prosecution of domestic violence cases during her career.

The grant is provided through the Attorney General's domestic Violence Homicide Prevention Unit. The mission of this unit is to promote safety, justice and stability for domestic violence victims and their children; to hold batterers accountable for the violence; and to stop and prevent future violence. The unit will aggressively prosecute misdemeanor and felony domestic violence prevention cases in a manner that does

not re-victimize victims, according to the Attorney General's office.

In many cases, the victim of domestic violence becomes reluctant to testify or continue prosecution of the abuser. A victim's reluctance is due to a variety of reasonable concerns: access of the abuser to the victim; lack of housing, child care, health care or income insufficient to provide for themselves or their children without the abuser's financial support; fear of the abuser's threat to take, harm or obtain custody of children; hope that the abuser will keep promises to stop the abuse; and belief that the prosecution will not result in consequences that will deter the abuser from further violence against the victim, or otherwise provide safety or stability for the victim. The domestic violence prosecutor will attempt to develop cases around the totality of the evidence rather than victim testimony alone.

The domestic violence prosecutor will also work closely with the River House Shelter to support victims of domestic violence. River House Shelter is a facility in Grayling designed to assist domestic violence victims and their families. This grant was made available to Roscommon County due in large part to COOR Coalition's and River House Shelter's actively seeking further support for local law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies, including the Michigan State Police, Gerrish and Richfield Township Police Departments and the Roscommon County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, have actively participated in the COOR Coalition, an organization formed to address the rising rates of domestic violence.

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Evacuees leave, but U.S. pays

Taxpayers pick up the tab for vacant rooms; Southfield Hotel officials say they're still registered.

Ron French / The Detroit News

November 28, 2005

SOUTHFIELD -- Hurricane Katrina evacuee Anthony Wells Sr. has a government-paid room at the Southfield Hotel even though he moved back to New Orleans three weeks ago.

So does Yarnell Green, who moved back the same time.

The hotel doesn't know whether Daniel Jackson, Roderick Rush and Calvin Hayes have moved back to the Gulf Coast -- their rooms are empty and the staff hasn't seen them recently -- but their vacant rooms are still being paid for by the government.

These rooms are among nine at the Southfield Hotel, formerly known as the Southfield Ramada, registered to evacuees not currently staying at the hotel or who could not be located by The Detroit News or the hotel staff.

Hotel officials last week could not explain why the evacuees remain registered in rooms costing taxpayers a minimum of \$325 a week. The hotel is not supposed to bill FEMA, the federal agency charged with paying for housing the evacuees, for people not physically staying in the rooms.

Five rooms registered to Katrina evacuees were empty, and the occupants of four others could not be located. Though some belongings remained in those four rooms, other hurricane victims staying at the hotel said no evacuees had been seen in those rooms for weeks.

"Some people have left without checking out or gone on an extended vacation," said hotel administrator Wallace Wells. "With the large numbers (of evacuees) we've had, there are going to be opportunities for mistakes."

FEMA, which has some 5,700 hotels across the country still housing 53,000 people, has no procedure for checking the accuracy of hotel bills, making the potential for overbilling large. The federal agency receives only a room count from the hotels rather than a list of the occupants of those rooms, according to FEMA spokesman Butch Kinerney.

"Any time we can identify a situation where there is any kind of fraudulent activity going on, we try to deal with it in the most expeditious way possible," Kinerney said. "If we find out that someone has been living out of that hotel for extended periods or set up housekeeping somewhere else, we'll follow up."

But Kinerney said the only way FEMA would learn of problems in hotel reimbursements is if "someone calls in a tip." He admitted the hotel reimbursement program is nearly impossible to police.

More than \$300 million has been spent so far in the sprawling government relief effort to provide temporary housing for tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents left homeless by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

While Kinerney is unaware of investigations into hotels billing FEMA for unoccupied rooms, hotels in Louisiana are being investigated for price gouging, raising nightly rates as evacuees

searched for shelter. A Katrina anti-fraud task force has been set up inside the U.S. attorney general's office to catch con artists trying to scam the system. That office is investigating hundreds of cases in which individuals or companies are accused of taking federal money meant for disaster relief.

After Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, more than 300 evacuees sought shelter in five Southfield hotels.

The number of evacuees registered at other Southfield facilities has declined in the past month, while the number at the Southfield Hotel has remained steady. According to a report compiled by the Southfield Emergency Management office, the Southfield Hotel claimed to have 118 evacuees on Oct. 21; on Nov. 15, the hotel said it had 117.

Tibebu Alemayehu, president and CEO of Village of Hope, the nonprofit relief organization set up by the hotel, says the hotel's evacuee population is documented in daily printouts dubbed the "Village of Hope Census."

According to Alemayehu, that census is based on the same list of names used to bill FEMA for evacuee lodging. A copy of the census for Nov. 17, provided to The News by Alemayehu, lists 51 rooms at the Southfield Hotel occupied by evacuees. Hotel owner Sam Yono confirmed he is being reimbursed by FEMA for "approximately 50" rooms.

The Southfield Hotel accounts for more than 20 percent of all Michigan hotel rooms still occupied by hurricane evacuees. According to FEMA statistics, there were 232 rooms in 29 Michigan hotels still housing storm survivors as of Wednesday.

But some of the rooms at the Southfield Hotel are no longer occupied by the storm victims listed in hotel records. For example:

Anthony Wells Sr. left Room 1427 about three weeks ago and returned to New Orleans. In a telephone interview last week, Wells said he signed paperwork at the hotel's front desk indicating that he was checking out. Three weeks later, his name and room number remained on the hotel census.

Alemayehu and hotel administrator Wallace Wells gave different reasons why FEMA was still paying for a room for Anthony Wells Sr. Alemayehu said the evacuee may have left to check on his New Orleans home and planned to return. In a telephone interview, Anthony Wells Sr. said he has no intention of returning to Michigan.

Wallace Wells said family members of Anthony Wells Sr. may remain in his room. The evacuee said there were no family members there.

Yarnell Green, Room 1507, returned to New Orleans about three weeks ago, according to fellow evacuee Rhonda Aubry. Aubry knows Green is gone because she drove Green to the Greyhound bus station and put him on a bus to New Orleans. Green remains registered in Room 1507, though The News could not locate anyone staying in the room. Evacuees living on the 15th floor said the room is empty.

Wallace Wells said Green remains registered at the hotel because Green told the front desk he would return to the hotel from New Orleans at some point.

Several evacuees have left the hotel for extended periods of time while remaining registered.

Larry Smith is currently in New Orleans, according to the hotel. Keith Reed recently returned to the hotel after being gone for two weeks "taking care of business," Wallace Wells said.

A room listed on the Nov. 17 census under the name of hurricane victim Terrence Jones was occupied Nov. 17 by two women who declined to provide their names but who confirmed they were from Detroit and that there were no evacuees staying in the room. Jones stayed at the Southfield Hotel for a few weeks in October but moved to the nearby Howard Johnson hotel

about three weeks ago. Jones, 34, of New Orleans says he doesn't know who is in his old hotel room or why he is still on the census.

Wallace Wells said hotel records indicate Jones checked out Nov. 7. He said it was unclear why Jones remained on the census or why telephone inquiries for Jones were connected by the hotel operator to his old room two weeks after he checked out.

The evacuees at the hotel have lived in close proximity to each other for as long as 12 weeks, staying in rooms on five floors of the 19-story hotel, which continued using the Ramada name until a Detroit News story in September disclosed that Ramada withdrew its franchise in December.

The evacuees have regular Wednesday night meetings and occasional benefit dinners. Yet numerous evacuees interviewed by The News did not recognize the names of a half-dozen people the hotel has registered as storm victims. Evacuees living in rooms close to the rooms in question said they have not seen or heard anyone in those rooms recently.

Evacuee Debbie Ernst questions whether the hotel houses 117 evacuees. Ernst, fiance Bobbie Smith and their three children moved out of the Southfield Hotel in October. "It was always the same faces at the meetings," said Ernst, who now lives in Detroit in a rented home. "I didn't see any new people."

"There were people listed who we never saw," said Thea White, a volunteer who has worked long hours each day at the hotel assisting evacuees for two months. "We'd knock on their doors, call their rooms and leave messages, slip memos under their doors."

Acting on inquiries by The News, hotel officials entered several rooms registered to evacuees Friday. Staff members found four rooms empty, and double-locked at least five rooms registered to evacuees who could not be located. Those evacuees will have to come to the hotel front desk to enter their rooms.

Wallace Wells said the hotel will continue to request reimbursement from FEMA for those rooms until the hotel is certain that the evacuees have left.

Wells lays the blame for discrepancies with evacuees. If taxpayers are paying for empty rooms, "95 percent of the problem is people aren't checking out," he said. "I would not be surprised if families are being negligent."

Since families are not responsible for paying for the rooms, some are in no rush to formally check out, even after they find housing in the community, Wells said.

"What we've noticed is that families just leave. These are adults. I'm not going to monitor their comings and goings. If I don't see them in 24 hours, I'm not going to check their room."

When that happens, there could be a "lag time" of up to three or four days for the hotel to realize a guest has left without checking out, Wells said. He could not explain why some rooms have been empty for weeks without the hotel noticing.

Wells said it's common for the evacuees to leave the hotel for days at a time to stay with friends and family in the area, and that some have taken "extended vacations."

"We are charging until the (guests) check out of the system," Wells said.

Yono said the hotel is reimbursed by FEMA for the rooms at the hotel's rack rate, which is \$79.95 per night, or \$325 per week.

Hotels can submit bills for evacuee rooms up to 14 days in advance. If an evacuee moves out within that period, the hotel is supposed to submit a corrected bill. FEMA could not immediately determine whether the Southfield Hotel had submitted any corrected bills.

It's unclear who at the hotel is responsible for submitting bills to FEMA for reimbursement. Alemayehu says it's the hotel's responsibility; Wallace Wells says he just works with evacuees. Yono called himself an "absentee owner" and that others actually run the hotel.

Yono said the hotel is not overbilling the government. He said he didn't know if the rooms in question were being billed to FEMA. He said his hotel would investigate the billing of empty rooms and would correct any discrepancies.

Alemayehu said the hotel has helped hundreds of evacuees out of the goodness of its owner's heart and that those who now complain about the relief effort might have questionable backgrounds. "We didn't ask their background when they came here," Alemayehu said.

On Dec. 14, FEMA will stop paying for evacuee rooms in Michigan. Yono said they can stay at the hotel through December without charge.

"My concern is only to help these people," Alemayehu said. "I am only dealing with that."

Nov 26, 5:19 PM EST

Paper: Hospitals Sent Homeless to Skid Row

LOS ANGELES (AP) --

Three hospitals acknowledge putting discharged homeless patients into taxicabs and sending them to the downtown skid row area, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Representatives of Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente West Los Angeles and Martin Luther King Jr./Drew Medical Center said they were helping patients because skid row offers them their best chance of getting services and shelter.

Patients are sent to skid row only if they are healthy enough, the representatives said.

"One of the challenges is that there are very few places that will take patients coming out of the hospital, even when they are medically cleared," said Mehera Christian, a spokeswoman for Kaiser Permanente Metro Los Angeles. "There are just a scarce number of places in the community to assist our homeless."

A Los Angeles Police Department report had accused the three hospitals and several suburban law enforcement agencies of leaving homeless people and criminals downtown. The suburban departments deny the accusation.

Police say the skid row neighborhood generates roughly one-fifth of the city's drug arrests.

Hospital social workers usually meet with patients to try to connect them with agencies or groups that could help them, then provide them transportation, Christian said. She said about half of patients say where they want to go, and none are forcibly taken anywhere.

Joseph Epps, an attorney for Hollywood Presbyterian, said hospital policy calls for homeless and indigent patients to be taken by hospital van to the Los Angeles Mission on skid row or to be given taxi vouchers to go wherever they want.

Police Capt. Andy Smith said patients don't always reach their destinations, and that he often sees "individuals with not one but sometimes two different hospital bracelets, and people with bandages on, people who are barely ambulatory, and we'll end up calling an ambulance. Sometimes they are in such bad hape they are incoherent."

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Residents seek ways to reduce heat costs

Sunday, November 27, 2005

By Larry O'Connor

loconnor@citpat.com -- 768-4926

To survive this winter, Mary Yinger suspects an extra blanket and dialing down the thermostat won't do the trick.

The Jackson single mother on a fixed income saw one monthly heating bill hit \$250 last year. She shivers at the thought of this winter's utility tab, especially with a projected 40-percent spike in fuel prices where the average monthly bill could be \$40 to \$50 more.

"I'm freaking," said Yinger, who receives Social Security disability after a November 1998 vehicle crash. "I don't know what I'm going to do, honestly."

Yinger's anxiety is shared by numerous service agencies, which are expecting a swell of low-income residents caught in the financial avalanche.

In an effort to coordinate resources, several representatives of nonprofits and faith-based groups formed a utility assistance initiative.

The ad-hoc group met at First Presbyterian Church on Nov. 10. Another gathering is planned for Dec. 1 at Lily Missionary Baptist Church.

"I think this is a great step forward to help people meet some of the basic needs," said Ken Toll, United Way of Jackson County's executive director.

Yinger isn't looking for a handout but for a way to cushion the financial toll of utility bills. She joined 12 others -- mostly women -- at a Community Action Agency-sponsored energy conservation seminar recently.

The class serves as a do-it-yourself version of the agency's free Weatherization Program, which allows qualified home owners and renters to receive preventative measures like insulation, caulk and weather stripping at a cost based on income.

About 13 people took part in a similar session in October, said Dawn Flynn, Community Action Agency energy and housing manager.

"If they can reduce their energy costs on their own, hopefully they won't end up in situations where they can't pay their bills," Flynn said.

Pamela Levy, a Hanover resident who also attended a session, said she got socked with a \$400 gas and electric bill.

She also signed up for the Community Action Agency's Weatherization program.

Though Levy's home has an 80-percent energy efficient furnace, the single-family dwelling is "old and creaky," she said. Her thermostat was set at 70 degrees, but that will be peeled back, she said.

With Tax Change, Some Charities Feel a Pinch

By VIVIAN MARINO

The New York Times

Published: November 28, 2005

The New Hope Day Center in Lansing, Mich., serves about 100 homeless people a day, providing two meals daily and programs like job training and substance abuse counseling. But the shelter could close next year - a casualty, the operators say, of changes in federal tax laws that make donating vehicles to charity less attractive for some people. Car and truck donations to the shelter, its largest source of income, are down about 40 percent from last year. Supporters of the tax changes, which took effect this year, say they are necessary to help eliminate rampant cheating by some taxpayers who inflate the value of their donated vehicles. Under the revisions, taxpayers who donate a vehicle can no longer deduct the fair market value, typically determined from sources like the Kelley Blue Book. Instead, they can claim only the amount an organization receives from selling or auctioning the vehicle, which is often below market value. The only exceptions to the changes are vehicles worth \$500 or less and ones that the charity keeps for its own use.

A study by the Government Accountability Office in 2003 found that taxpayers wrote off \$654 million in vehicle deductions for the 2000 tax year, but that charities actually received only about 5 percent of that amount. Tightening the deduction rules, supporters estimate, will raise \$2.4 billion over 10 years.

Many of the estimated 4,000 nonprofit groups with vehicle-donation programs say the new regulations are reducing their revenue and, in some cases, affecting operations.

Because of the lower deduction allowances, some people who might have considered donating vehicles are selling them or giving them to relatives, many groups say. Others report receiving more "clunkers," which bring in less money.

"Unfortunately, our worst fears have come true," said Ronald H. Field, vice president for public policy at Volunteers of America, which is based in Alexandria, Va., and whose Michigan affiliate runs the New Hope Day Center.

Like many other charities, Volunteers of America had a surge in car donations at the end of last year, as many people rushed to beat the changes in the tax code. This year, donations are down

30 percent to 40 percent, Mr. Field said, and revenue from vehicle sales has dropped almost 50 percent.

Although only a small percentage of the organization's total revenue comes from car sales, Mr. Field said, "this is unrestricted money that helps pay for gaps in funding."

Thomas P. Roberts, director of government relations for Melwood, a nonprofit group in Maryland that provides job training for the developmentally disabled, agreed. The new law "has prevented us from further expanding our services," Mr. Roberts said, adding that he expected a drop of up to 60 percent in income from the vehicle programs this year.

The effect has been profound at the New Hope Day Center. About 40 percent of its \$1.2 million annual budget comes from car donations, with the rest received through government grants and other private donations, the operators say.

The shelter had been scheduled to close last March, said Patrick Patterson, vice president for Lansing operations at Volunteers of America Michigan, but stopgap financing from local foundations is expected to keep it open through early next year. Mr. Patterson said the group was also forced to sell its administration building in Lansing.

"We understand the reasons why the tax rules were changed; we're all for enforcing the law," he said. "But let's not make it so draconian that they hurt the very charities we rely upon to provide services."

Washtenaw United Way at 79% of 2005 goal

Campaign reports \$6.1 million in pledges

Saturday, November 26, 2005

BY LIZ COBBS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Washtenaw United Way campaign officials say the \$7.8 million goal for 2005 is within reach but there's more fund raising to be done before year's end.

So far, the campaign is reporting \$6.1 million in pledges, or 79 percent of the 2005 goal.

The public phase of the campaign ended Nov. 18 and volunteers are now working behind the scenes to encourage individuals and businesses to remember the local United Way in their year-end giving. The campaign continues through the end of the year.

"I feel strongly we've got a very good shot of reaching our goal," said Mike Lypka, who, with Mike Anderson, is campaign co-chairman this year. "We had an aggressive goal in light of the economic conditions, but we're going to do what we've got to do to make our goal."

This year's goal of \$7.8 million is the same amount that was set and reached in 2004.

The money raised during Washtenaw United Way's annual general campaign supports 35 health and human services; community affiliates in Dexter, Milan and Saline; the United Way Regional Call Center; and Washtenaw Success by 6, an early childhood initiative.

For the past several years, the sluggish economy, the war in Iraq and local donations going to support disaster relief efforts due to terrorist attacks and natural disasters have been among the challenges faced by the United Way's largest fund-raising drive of the year.

This year, for example, Hurricane Katrina drew significant donations from the area, while uncertainty in the automotive industry, with the bankruptcy of Delphi Corp. and massive job cuts by General Motors Corp., also has an affect on local donations.

Anderson and Lypka know about GM's problems since both work at the Willow Run Powertrain plant in Ypsilanti Township. Lypka is director of global supply chain and Anderson is sourcing representative for UAW Local 735 at the plant.

While campaigning at the plant, Lypka and Anderson said they took the one-on-one approach, talking to people personally about the Washtenaw United Way and the agencies it supports.

Both campaigners say they were pleased in October when pledges from the auto plant totaled \$355,000, which was \$35,000 over its 2005 goal.

The co-chairmen also attended workplace fundraisers around the county and also visited some of the United Way-funded agencies.

"I didn't realize how much was involved," Anderson said. "The events that people do in the workplace just to raise money for the United Way are unbelievable. And they do it to help people. It's all about people."

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6810.

Editorials & Letters

United Way giving remarkable

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, November 25, 2005

JOURNAL READER

With all the disquieting economic news that is buffeting Genesee County these days, it is indeed remarkable and heartening to know that those who can, are going beyond the call of duty to give generously to the United Way campaign this holiday season.

Many organizations and their employees are exceeding by far their normal giving: Citizens Bank; Baker College; school districts including Beecher, Davison, Flushing, Lake Fenton and Swartz Creek; Merrill Lynch; Trialon; Landaal Packaging; Channel 12 (WJRT); the majority of General Motors sites; Service and Parts Operations; Comcast; Marshall Field's;

Compak/Webcor; and Kohl's are all coming in over past giving by double-digit percentages. And there are some other simply incredible results to report: Randy Wise Auto Group increased its already healthy giving by 85 percent, Kohl's by more than 30 percent. Target and Comcast also skyrocketed by last year's gift. Foundations in our community are being generous as well.

There are others, and to each of those on behalf of United Way and the citizens of Genesee County who stand to get much-needed help in the months ahead, I offer thanks and gratitude for being part of such a tremendous community.

Tom Bryson
campaign chairman
United Way of Genesee County

STERLING HEIGHTS

Shop with a Cop donations sought

For the eighth year, the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 118, Wal-Mart and the Sterling Heights Police Department will host the Shop with a Cop program to benefit the children of low-income families. Police officers will accompany 50 children as they shop for toys, food and clothing for their family Dec. 10. Each child will get \$120 to spend. For information or to donate to the program, contact Sterling Heights Det. Randy DePriest at (586) 446-2844.

Monday, November 28, 2005

Michael J. McCormick, Birmingham: Upbeat editor was beloved News man

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Detroit News Production Editor Michael J. McCormick put the final touches on the newspaper that goes on sale today in Metro Detroit to benefit 36,000 less-fortunate children this holiday season.

But for the first time in two decades, Mr. McCormick won't know how much money his efforts helped to raise for the Old Newsboys' Goodfellow Fund of Detroit, which will use the proceeds to buy warm clothes and gifts for children in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park.

Mr. McCormick, of Birmingham, died Saturday, Nov. 26, 2005, at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak from complications related to liver disease. He was 60.

"He'll never know how much he did for all of us, the whole operation," said Pete Waldmeir of the Old Newsboys' Goodfellow Fund and retired columnist for The News.

"He did an awful lot for all those kids."

Mr. McCormick was the kind of person most people would have liked to have known, his friends and colleagues said.

Sporting a trademark head of thick white hair, he was warm and kind, easygoing and funny.

"He was the sort of person who could walk into a room not knowing anyone and within five minutes, everyone just loved him," said his son, Matthew.

Family and friends remembered him as a man they held in utmost regard.

"He was an incredibly caring and compassionate individual devoted to his family and absolutely cherished my mother," said Matthew McCormick. "More than anything else, he was incredibly independent and lived his life very much on his own terms."

Mr. McCormick handled The News' internship program and helped launch the careers of dozens of young journalists, which garnered him respect from his co-workers, including Jim Gatti, former deputy managing editor of The News.

"Mike was a fun-loving guy, full of energy, who always had a way of putting the best light on everything," Gatti said. "He had a great sense of humor. He just had a great outlook on life."

David Butler, editor and publisher of The Detroit News since August, quickly came to know Mr. McCormick as someone co-workers enjoyed.

"Mike was a dedicated worker who always anticipated problems and made everybody's job easier," Butler said.

Mr. McCormick was born in New York but soon moved with his family to Ohio. He studied journalism at Ohio State University in the 1960s and became a huge fan of the Buckeyes and their legendary coach, Woody Hayes. "Here it is straight from one of the many honest-to-God-scarlett-and-gray-let-me-kiss-you-on-the-lips-Woody football nuts from Ohio," McCormick wrote in a Nov. 16, 1976, article in The News. "Buckeyes are crazy when it comes to the (University of) Michigan game."

The Buckeyes weren't the only ones McCormick fell in love with while at Ohio State. It was there he met his wife of 34 years, Sharon.

After they wed, they had a daughter, Molly, now 29, and son, Matthew, 24.

Mr. McCormick landed his first job out of college at The Columbus Citizen Journal.

In 1971, he accepted a job as a copy editor at The News, where he worked for nearly 35 years.

During his tenure, he became the night news editor in 1974 and was promoted to news editor. He eventually worked in production.

Friends and colleagues observed that Mr. McCormick had a gift of being comfortable with anyone.

"You could set him down in a poker game with a bunch of factory workers or put him in with the country club set and Mike would find a common ground," said Felix Grabowski, creative director for The News' Web site. "If you were with Mike, you were going to have a good time."

Survivors include his wife, Sharon; daughter, Molly; son, Matthew; sister, Merry; brother-in-law, Doug; sister-in-law, Gayle; and a host of nieces and nephews.

Visitation will be held from 6-8 p.m. Tuesday at A.J. Desmond & Sons Funeral Home, 32515 Woodward, Royal Oak. A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Wednesday at the funeral home.

Memorials should be directed to the Old Newsboys' Goodfellow Fund of Detroit, P.O. Box 44444, Detroit 48244.